

Abstract ID : 312

Title : HAWAIIAN MONK SEAL (*Monachus schauinslandi*): STATUS AND CONSERVATION ISSUES

Category : Conservation

Student : Not Applicable

Preferred Format : Oral Presentation

Abstract : The Hawaiian monk seal (*Monachus schauinslandi*) is the only endangered pinniped occurring entirely within U.S. waters. Its current population is estimated at 1,300 to 1,400 seals, a decrease of 60% since the 1950s. Counts declined about 5% yr⁻¹ from 1985 to 1993, remained relatively stable through 2000, and declined in 2001 and 2002. Population trends have been variable at the six main reproductive subpopulations in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI). In recent years overall pup production and juvenile survival have decreased at most sites. The largest subpopulation is at French Frigate Shoals where counts of non-pups have dropped by 60% since 1989, and the age distribution has become severely inverted due to high juvenile mortality over the last decade. Future abundance trends will likely depend upon whether predicted losses at French Frigate Shoals are countered by gains at other locations. Monk seals occur throughout the Hawaiian Archipelago, and although most are found in the NWHI, a small but increasing number haulout and pup in the main Hawaiian Islands. They commonly occur on isolated beaches for resting, molting, parturition, and nursing offspring; and forage on demersal and epibenthic prey. Past and present sources of anthropogenic and natural impacts to monk seals include hunting, disturbance (e.g., past military activities), entanglement in marine debris, direct fishery interaction, predation by sharks, aggression by adult male monk seals, and reduction of habitat and prey due to environmental change. Assessment and mitigation of factors limiting population growth is an ongoing challenge and a primary objective of the monk seal recovery effort.